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Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Summary record of the 295th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 19 July 2006, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. Badji ..... (Senegal)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.45 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

1. *The agenda was adopted.*

Report by the Chairman on developments since the previous meeting

2. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that on 13 June 2006, in his capacity as Chairman, he had joined a delegation which had visited the Secretary-General to protest the Israeli military's killing of a Palestinian family on a beach in the Gaza Strip, on 9 June 2006. The delegation had also included representatives of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab Group of Permanent Representatives to the United Nations in New York, and the Permanent Observer for Palestine to the United Nations.

3. On 30 June 2006 the Security Council had met to consider the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. Qatar had introduced a draft resolution by which the Council would have called for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli soldier abducted by Palestinian militants; called upon Israel to ensure the immediate and unconditional release of all detained Palestinian ministers, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council and other officials, as well as other illegally detained Palestinian civilians; called upon Israel to halt its military operations and disproportionate use of force and withdraw its forces to their original positions outside the Gaza Strip; and requested the Secretary-General to report back to the Security Council on the implementation of the resolution.

4. The Council had voted on the draft resolution on 13 July 2006, but the draft resolution had not been adopted because a permanent member of the Council had voted against it.

5. In a statement of 8 July 2006, United Nations humanitarian agencies working in the Occupied Territory had expressed alarm at the developments on the ground, stating that the already alarming situation in the Gaza Strip was likely to deteriorate rapidly, and that unless urgent action was taken the agencies would face a humanitarian crisis that would have far-reaching consequences for the communities in which they worked and for the institutions through which they acted on the ground.

Report by the Chairman on the United Nations International Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace and the Consultations with civil society organizations

6. **The Chairman** informed the Committee that he had attended the two-day United Nations Meeting in Support of Israeli-Palestinian Peace, followed by the Committee Consultations with Civil Society Organizations, held in Vienna from 27 to 29 June 2006.

7. The Meeting had been held at a time of major political changes for both Israelis and Palestinians, and against the background of the worsening political, economic and humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and the whole of the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem.

8. The proceedings had been attended by representatives of 57 Governments, Palestine, three intergovernmental organizations, six United Nations entities and 23 civil society organizations. The three panel topics had been the situation in the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem; the peace process and challenges ahead; and international efforts in support of Israeli-Palestinian peace. Presentations had been made by 14 experts from Europe, North America and the Middle East, including Palestinians and Israelis.

9. Participants had adopted a Final Document in which they urged the resumption of a meaningful political dialogue between the parties and expressed their concern over the unilateral measures taken by Israel. They had also spoken against escalating the current crisis and against perpetuating the cycle of violence, and had condemned the continuing construction of the wall and expansion of the settlements by Israel in violation of international law and its obligations under the Quartet's road map. On the positive side, the participants had welcomed the agreement on the National Conciliation Document reached between Palestinian political groups on 26 June 2006.

10. On 29 June 2006 the Committee delegation had held consultations with NGO representatives concerning the Committee's programme of cooperation with civil society. Sixteen representatives from Africa,

Asia, Europe, North America and the Middle East, including Palestinians and Israelis, had taken part in the event. The Committee had convened the one-day consultations in order to further its ongoing dialogue with NGO representatives and strengthen its cooperation with civil society, in accordance with its mandate.

11. The civil society representatives had described their current initiatives, campaigns and projects, and had stressed that they regarded the United Nations and international law as central to ending Israeli occupation and building a just peace between both peoples. They had also expressed the view that the Committee's 2006 Civil Society Conference should expand its scope to include representatives of peace movements, political parties and trade unions and should focus on achieving the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.

12. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to take note of his report.

13. *It was so decided.*

Report by the Chairman on the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East

14. **The Chairman** said that from 8 to 9 June 2006, in his capacity as Chairman of the Committee, he had attended the International Media Seminar on Peace in the Middle East, held in Moscow. Participants in the seminar had included a number of distinguished members of the media, leading politicians, academics, researchers, as well as a number of diplomats, notably including representatives of European Union member countries.

15. The seminar had been very successful, with participants engaging in lively, fruitful and instructive discussions on the theme of "new challenges for the peace process in the Middle East and for the Israeli-Palestinian dialogue". He had addressed the seminar on the subject of the Committee's mandate and its relevance to the challenges currently faced by the Palestinian people, and the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process had stressed the obstacles to the resumption of the peace process.

16. The seminar had also included six workshops on the subtopics of challenges, opportunities and responsibilities in the wake of the Israeli and Palestinian elections; the impact of the media on the peace process; the impact of regional developments on peace in the Middle East; the economic and social viability of the two-State solution; the challenge of strengthening local capacities and intercommunity cooperation; and the participation of civil society and prospects for grass-roots initiatives.

17. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to take note of his report.

18. *It was so decided.*

International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People

19. **The Chairman** drew attention to working paper No. 3, which contained the provisional programme for the International Conference of Civil Society in Support of the Palestinian People, to be held from 7 to 8 September 2006 at the United Nations Office at Geneva. The Committee delegation would be composed of Mr. Farhâdi, Vice-Chairman of the Committee; Mr. Camilleri, Rapporteur; Mr. Mansour, Observer for Palestine; and himself.

20. The Conference would draw on the positive results of previous United Nations Conferences of Civil Society and would focus on the current situation in the Occupied Territory, including East Jerusalem, and on related action by civil society. It was envisaged that a plan of action would be adopted by participants at the close of the conference.

21. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) said he was gratified to note from the provisional programme that the Chairman had taken up the suggestion made by civil society representatives to expand the scope of the Civil Society Conference. However, he wondered why the provisional programme included an item entitled, "The Global South and Palestinian rights".

22. **The Chairman** recalled that the Committee had previously decided to encourage greater involvement by NGOs from the South, having realized that most NGOs engaged in the Palestinian question were from the North. A large number of NGOs from Asia, Latin America and southern and western Africa had since become involved in the question, and the network of NGOs had therefore wished to reflect that increased involvement in the provisional programme.

23. If he heard no objection, he would take it that the Committee wished to approve the provisional programme of the conference.

24. *It was so decided.*

Accreditation of civil society organizations to the Committee

25. **The Chairman** drew the Committee's attention to Working Paper No. 4, which contained applications from five non-governmental organizations for accreditation to the Committee and a request by one non-governmental organization for observer status with the Committee.

26. The Bureau, assisted by the Division for Palestinian Rights, had reviewed the applications and concluded that four of the organizations concerned fulfilled the criteria for accreditation. With the exception of Talented Youths International of Nigeria, the organizations that had applied for accreditation had demonstrated that they had concrete programmes in support of the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The Bureau had recommended that, for the time being, Talented Youths International be awarded the status of observer.

27. He therefore took it that the Committee wished to approve the applications as suggested by the Bureau, with the exception of that of Talented Youths International, which, together with Elhanan Benevolent of Gaza, would be granted observer status.

28. *It was so decided.*

Other matters

29. **Mr. Hamidon Ali** (Malaysia) referred to a letter dated 13 June 2006 in which the Chairman had requested the Government of Malaysia to host a regional meeting for Asia and the Pacific on the question of Palestine in December 2006, and said that his Government would be happy to accede to that request and would proceed with the arrangements for the meeting in cooperation with the Secretariat and the Chairman in order to determine the exact date of the meeting, which he understood would take place during the week of 18 to 22 December 2006.

30. The Chairman expressed his appreciation for the prompt response of the Government of Malaysia, which was clearly an expression of its unfailing commitment not only to the Palestinian people but also to the Committee, and of its continued dynamism in contributing actively to the Committee's work.

31. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) said that, while his delegation appreciated the Chairman's work with representatives of Palestine and the relevant international organizations, and also the briefings given by the Permanent Observer for Palestine on developments in that territory, the Committee's current programme of work gave the impression that the Committee was addressing only statutory issues rather than including the evolution of the situation on the ground in its discussions, and therefore appeared to be lagging behind events. In view of the tragic situation prevailing in the Middle East, the Committee should keep abreast of and respond in a timely manner to those developments. Other bodies such as the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the League of Arab States, the Non-Aligned Movement and the Security Council had recognized the urgency of addressing the situation on the ground and were responding accordingly. He therefore suggested that the Chairman, working with the Permanent Observer for Palestine, should consider and decide on the usefulness of including the issue of the situation on the ground on the Committee's agenda, and on how exactly it should feature in the Committee's discussions.

32. **The Chairman** said that the fact that the issue of the situation on the ground had not been included on the agenda did not mean that the Committee was not addressing that situation. The item had been removed from the agenda because the Permanent Observer for Palestine had been unable to attend the meeting to brief the Committee. The present meeting should therefore be treated as an exception, since the issue was otherwise systematically included on the agenda. Although the Committee was unable to meet on a continuous basis, he himself was constantly seeking to discuss any possible initiatives relating to the situation on the ground, and both he and the Bureau were working daily to address the matter, and received a daily briefing on events on the ground from the Division for Palestinian Rights. The Bureau had raised the issue in the Security Council, and met once a month or every two months to discuss it. More recently, in Vienna, the Committee had discussed the matter in depth with civil society organizations.

33. When discussing the Palestinian question, not only the Committee but also the General Assembly and the Security Council were often left with a sense of frustration, since it was difficult to achieve any positive or concrete results, and the Committee was

able only to persuade rather than oblige or compel parties to act. Since the Committee was a subsidiary body with a subsidiary mandate, it could do little beyond pursuing an end to hostilities and calling for the resumption of negotiations. However, the Committee should not feel that its efforts were secondary to those of the Quartet, for example, which was able to bring direct influence to bear on the matter; nor should those efforts be perceived as inactivity on the Committee's part regarding the situation on the ground.

34. **Mr. Talbot** (Guyana) said that his delegation shared the sentiments expressed by the representative of Mali and by the Chairman. His delegation had also been somewhat surprised that the agenda for the Committee's meeting had not allowed for reflection on the events that were unfolding on the ground with tragic consequences for the Palestinian people. His delegation welcomed the active efforts of the Chairman and the Bureau to keep abreast of and respond to those events, and hoped that the Committee would be kept informed of activities on the ground and provided with the opportunity to consider possible ways and means of advancing its mandate in that regard.

35. **Mr. Koubaa** (Tunisia), endorsing the comments by the representative of Mali and the Chairman, said that his delegation encouraged the Chairman in his commendable efforts and urged him to consider all positive initiatives that might be taken within the Committee, whether through its programme of work or through bilateral initiatives, to enable it to contribute to the efforts of the international community to resolve the current crisis, which endangered peace and security not only in the region but throughout the world.

36. **Mr. Diarra** (Mali) explained he had intended to praise the efforts of the Chairman, the Bureau and the Palestinian observer, and had merely wished to suggest that they consider the possibility of supplementing efforts within the Committee by considering whether its mandate allowed it to put forward suggestions to the General Assembly as to steps that the latter might take in response to the evolution of the situation. The Committee might, for example, suggest that the General Assembly hold an emergency special session, rather than allowing that initiative to be taken by entities outside the United Nations system. Consultations could be held with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine on the timeliness and usefulness of convening such a session. There might also be other initiatives that the Committee could take in approaching the General Assembly.

37. **The Chairman** noted that the convening of an emergency special session of the General Assembly was a highly political matter that required a great deal of prior work and faced many obstacles, including issues beyond the Palestinian question. The issue of the situation on the ground was at the heart of the Committee's agenda, and one which both he and the Bureau were working daily with the Permanent Observer Mission of Palestine to address. Consideration was also being given to the questions of how the Committee could become more involved with the Quartet and what it could do to ensure that the concerns of its members were taken into account by the Secretary-General. As a subsidiary body of the General Assembly, the Committee must abide by its mandate. It must also exercise caution in deciding how to proceed, since its activities were closely followed and must not give grounds for any criticism of it as being under Palestinian authority.

38. **Ms. Taj El Dine** (Observer for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela), endorsing the comments made by previous speakers, expressed grave concern at the events taking place in Palestine and in Lebanon. She asked whether the Committee was able to take specific steps to call for an emergency special session of the General Assembly. The Committee had always been effective and efficient in responding to issues in accordance with its mandate and the relevant General Assembly resolutions, and her delegation welcomed the Chairman's comments in that regard. Any action that the Committee took within its mandate would be welcomed and fully supported by Venezuela.

39. **The Chairman** said that it was not within the Committee's mandate to request an emergency special session of the General Assembly. Close familiarity with the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and with the Committee's mandate was necessary in order to understand clearly the Committee's duties and responsibilities. If an emergency special session was convened, the Committee would participate in its capacity as an international body.

The meeting rose at 11.55 a.m.